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# THE BRIDGE BETWEEN WEST AND EAST

101 The political boundary between Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia is not a clear-cut dividing line between two different worlds. There are a number of Ruthenian peasants in the eastern parts of Slovakia who form a gradual transition between the two neighbours. True, the Slovaks and the Ruthenians are two different Slav races. The Slovaks are closely related to the Moravians and Czechs in the West; the Ruthenians belong to the Russian family—mainly to its Ukrainian branch—although the thousand years of isolation from their kinsmen have had a specific effect on the character of the Ruthenian population on the southern slopes of the Carpathians. But there is a gradual link between the Slovaks and the Ruthenians, and Carpathian Ruthenia may aptly be described as a bridge between the Western and Eastern Slavs.

131 Geographically, too, the two neighbouring countries are similar. A
175 chain of wooded mountains separates them from the kindred Slav populations to the North and North-East; while to the South both countries have stretches of fertile plain which run down unobstructed into the vast Danubian basin. That is the reason why both countries fell victim to Hungarian expansion early in their history and remained under Hungarian rule as second-rate provinces for a thousand years. Until the end of 1918, neither Slovakia nor Carpathian Ruthenia were on the map.

177 Both these countries suffered from the long alien domination which
212 hampered their development. Slovakia was the more fortunate of the two because, in spite of her political separation from the independent lands of the Czech Crown, cultural and religious contacts with them had been maintained for centuries. But the Ruthenians received less support of this kind from their kindred beyond the Carpathians. As a result, Ruthenia was still more at the mercy of her Hungarian overlords and remained in a state of greater backwardness than her neighbour in the West. This is well illustrated by the degree of illiteracy in Ruthenia under the Hungarian regime which was, indeed, appalling; according to the last Hungarian census about three quarters of the Ruthenian population could not read or write.

177 Only people of considerable racial individuality could have resisted
181 systematic denationalisation as the Ruthenians did. They may be a simple people; but their mode of living, their outlook and their character have an unmistakable stamp of their own.

They are a mountain people who cling to the place where they

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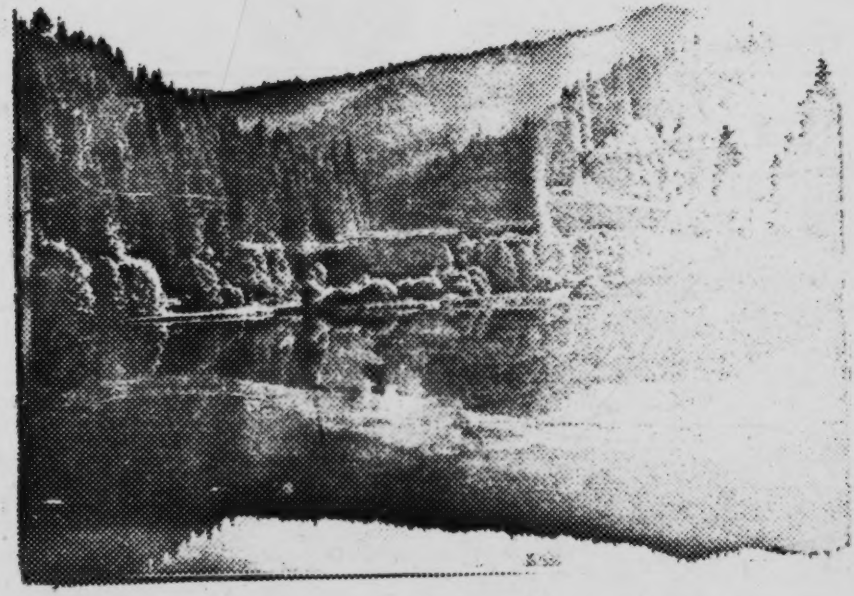
In the heart of the Carpathian mountains

Lake in the Carpathian forests



— CZECHOSLOVAKIA —

they are a mountain people who clung to the place where they
177 were born. This applies even to those who, through force of circum-
181 stances, had to leave their native village to earn their living elsewhere.
167 Some have found occupation in the fertile South; but when they have saved some money they want to return home and are prepared to pay a higher price for a few poor fields, although in the valleys of the South they could buy much better land for the same amount. Hundreds of thousands have emigrated to America, where about as many Ruthenians can be found as have remained in the homeland under the Carpathians. Yet many long to come back home to find their last resting place in the native soil.

137 The peculiar beauty of this forgotten country has a strong grip
313 on her simple sons. The Ruthenian Carpathians are not so high as the Slovak peaks, but the vast stretches of dense forest, which cover almost half of Ruthenia, give the country a more primeval appearance. Some of the woods and slopes are delightful idylls, where the fresh and fragrant air is full of hum and rustle and warble. But in many parts, unchartered and untouched by human hand, the forest is sombre. Trees felled by storm or gale lie dead where they have fallen, and there is a smell of rotting wood in this lonely wilderness. Wild boar, wolf, lynx and bear have their hunting ground here, while above the tops of the mighty pines, firs, oaks and maples, circle the eagle and the hawk. Other parts of the forest are enlivened by the rhythmical sound of the axe cutting down trees to be floated down the rushing mountain streams. A large proportion of the hardy Ruthenians earn their living in this way. But above this expanse of deep forest are the sunlit pastures and upland meadows sprinkled with gentian, buttercups, pansies, chrysanthemums and geraniums. Sheep and cattle graze here during the summer months; Ruthenia is also a country of shepherds, who blow their huge horns at night to gather the scattered herds.

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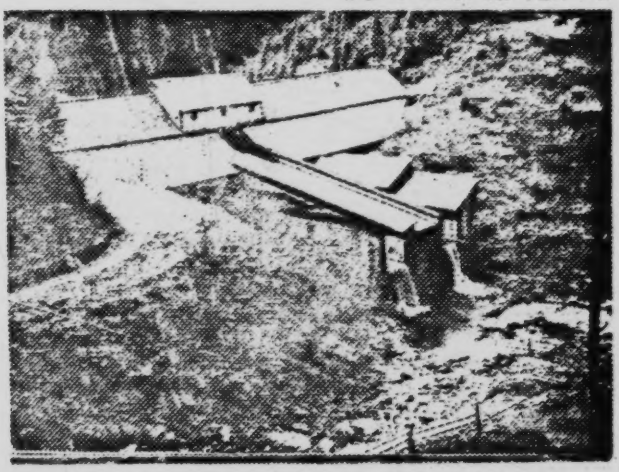

Wooden dam in Ruthenia

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Ruthenians

Shepherds blow huge horns to round up their sheep by night

511 In the narrow valleys and on their slopes are cottages and straggling
464 villages where the Ruthenian uplanders live. Nearly, all the huts are
241 made of wood and are flanked by gardens with patches of sunflowers.
311 In the higher altitudes the land consists mainly of meadows, and such meagre fields as there are yield scanty crops of oats, potatoes or hemp—not sufficient to live on. No wonder that during the summer months it is chiefly women and children who can be found at home; the menfolk either fell trees in the forest or earn their living as seasonal labourers in the towns and villages of the more prosperous South.

101 These lonely mountains and forests breed a people with a distinct
162 character of their own. Living as they do in seclusion, they not only differ from their Slovak neighbours but show distinct regional differences

101 among themselves. They can be divided into three well-defined tribes
162 —the Lemki on the Slovak border, the Boiki in the centre, and the Huculs in the eastern tip of Ruthenia.

The most interesting tribe are the Huculs. They have preserved
186 their tribal characteristics better than their kinsmen. Their standard of education is higher, and they are more conscious and proud of their national individuality. When the Hungarians invaded Ruthenia after the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, the Huculs offered the stiffest resistance, and during the war they were the core of the partisan force fighting against the totalitarian powers. Like the other Ruthenian
463 mountaineers, the Huculs are largely wood-cutters and raftsmen. But
342 they are distinguished by their skill as carpenters and wood-carvers. This is clearly reflected in their mode of life. Their wooden-cottages are neatly built and furnished and impress the visitor by their scrupulous cleanliness. Their tribal individuality and artistic skill find expression in the numerous carvings with which they like to decorate their unpainted houses.

181 The neighbouring Boiki have also, to some extent, preserved their
511 pride in racial individuality, and their mode of life, though more primitive, has some interesting features. They are kind-hearted, sincere and hospitable, in spite of their poverty. Though less proud than the Huculs, they fly into a temper when crossed, and impulsive outspoken-
342 ness is one of their traits. They live in cottages and huts which they like to paint in blue and brown, and this makes their exterior rather attractive. But the interior does not always live up to the façade. The better-off Boiki manage to live in fairly decent cottages with two or more rooms, but the huts of the poor often consist of one room only—a dark room with no chimney, one small window, and some roughly
352 made furniture. Some have no bedsteads in the true sense of the word; along the whole wall of the room one may find a long "plank-bed" where the grown-ups sleep at the one end and the children at the other. When the children grow up they sleep on separate beds of the same kind. Unlike the Hucul houses, the Boiki huts have no wooden
342 floors. The domestic animals often share the same room with their
511 masters in winter, sleeping on the bare earth. For many families such a room is therefore a kitchen, living room, bedroom, hall and stable in one.

511 Much the same applies to the Lemki tribe who live partly on
181 Slovak territory. They are the poorest Ruthenian tribe and their racial character has undergone a certain deterioration. Their standard of life is often appalling, the hygiene leaves much to be desired, and they have the largest number of illiterates, though some improvement has taken place under the Republic.

000 Mountainous Ruthenia is a country of traditional costumes. The

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Religious procession in a Ruthenian village

How they build churches in Ruthenia

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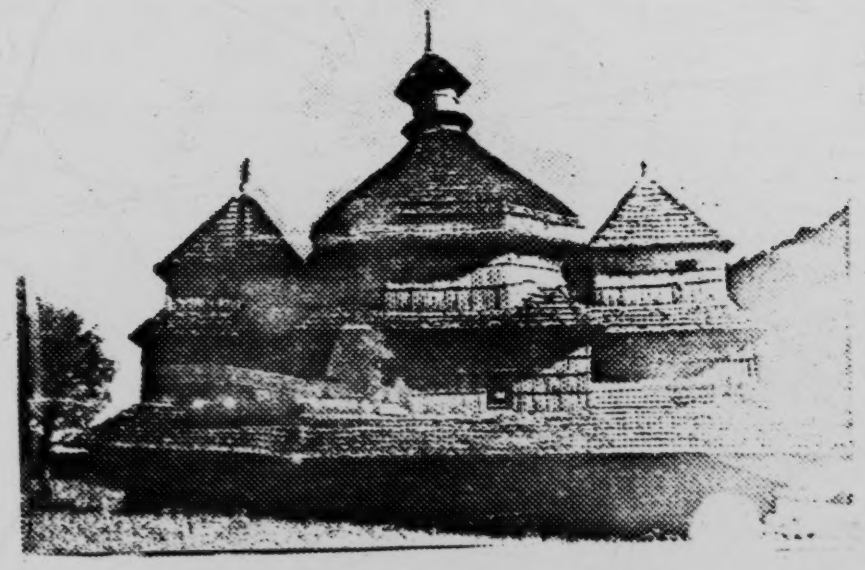

292 Mountainous Ruthenia is a country of traditional costumes. The
531 beautiful embroideries which decorate them and their colour-effects testify to the innate artistic sense of the people. Their patterns and hues vary not only from tribe to tribe but also from village to village. Blue, brown and red are their favourite colours, but one may say that practically all the colours are represented. On weekdays their attire is rather simple. But on Sundays and festivals the space in front of the wooden church is a veritable kaleidoscope of well-blended hues. Particularly striking is the garb of the Huculs whose artistic talent also shows in their elaborate wood-carvings and in their love of music.

609 Life is hard in the mountains and forests of Carpathian Ruthenia.
574 Yet the small farmers, wood-cutters, labourers and shepherds who live there are a friendly and hospitable race. The traditional rule that a stranger who comes into a Ruthenian cottage is to be hospitably received has found a remarkable illustration in recent times. The inhabitants of one village in the South have decided that the passengers on the bus which passes through the village once a day have to be treated as guests. And so whenever the bus arrives a peasant woman with a basket full of fruit or cheese or buns is waiting at the stop to share out her eatables among the travellers.

177 In the southern part of the country life and people are different.
471 Here one comes across fields of maize, wheat and tobacco, while on the
563 sunny hills bordering on the fertile plain further south there are rich vineyards. But most of this good soil is not the property of the
464 Ruthenians; they have been pushed into the mountains by the Hun-
241 garians who owe much of the land and employ the native Ruthenians as seasonal labourers. In this part of the country the population is mixed, and the Ruthenians who live here have surrendered much of their racial individuality as well as the traditional costumes. No wonder that those uplanders who moved south for economic reasons long to return to their poor but proud mountains.

369 Carpathian Ruthenia is a rural country. Even its largest towns,
655 such as Mukačevo with a State tobacco factory and other works, Berehovo, the centre of the Ruthenian wine trade, Sevljuš with excellent
438 vineyards, are essentially provincial in character.

The largest town, Užhorod, has assumed the character of a modern
361 city since it became the capital of Carpathian Ruthenia during the twenty years of the Czechoslovak Republic. The government built here
341 imposing public buildings as well as large blocks of up-to-date residential flats for its civil servants. Prominent among these representative buildings is Zemský Úrad housing the headquarters of the administration of Carpathian Ruthenia; its façade is strictly modern and its interior, particularly the Parliament Chamber and the large Reception Hall, is beautifully equipped.

This part of Užhorod is well laid out; right along the river bank

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A wooden hut in the Carpathians

Ruthenian lumberjacks making rafts on the Black Tisz

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361 is a wide boulevard bordered with beautiful flowers. Across the river,
341 to the left from a bridge, is a colourful little church in Russian style—a miniature replica of a Moscow *cerkev*—a piece of the Orient in a western setting. It is a delightful building coloured in dull red and white, and has a burnished cupola at the top which reflects the sun in a dazzling blaze. The interesting ikons in the interior match the fairy-tale beauty of its exterior. What a lively contrast to the dignified, twin-spired Greek Catholic cathedral and the surrounding ecclesiastical buildings on the opposite side of the river.

162 There are at least four religions in Užhorod as well as in other
563 Ruthenian towns, and five languages are spoken there—Ruthenian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and Yiddish.

While Ruthenia has no mineral wealth comparable to that of
135 Slovakia, it supplies the entire Republic with salt. In the eastern tip
317 of the country, right on the Rumanian frontier, there are huge deposits of mineral salt in the neighbourhood of Slatinské Doly. Although only two mines are now being worked, the annual output amounts to about 120,000 tons of salt. The huge vaulted caves of these mines afford an imposing view from a gallery which rises at a considerable height above the bottom where the miners quarry large blocks of rock-salt, cut them into small blocks, and have them hoisted through the shaft to the surface. The mineral salt which is crushed in a salt-mill is only slightly impure and requires little cleaning.

317 Salt represents the mineral wealth of Carpathian Ruthenia. But it
263 is a commodity which the poor Ruthenian peasants and wood-cutters cannot afford. In order to spice their simple and meagre food the countryfolk journey a day or two to a pool of salt-water to fill a barrel with the liquid salt.

178 To appreciate the degree of progress Carpathian Ruthenia made
511 during the twenty years of its association with Czechoslovakia, one has to bear in mind the condition of this forgotten country when it first
185 appeared on the map as a political unit. The dire poverty, the low standard of education among the majority of the population, lack of cultural amenities, infectious diseases due to abominable sanitary conditions, inadequate communications, economic and political exploitation — all these factors made the life of the Ruthenians under the Carpathian mountains rather desolate.

President Masaryk once said that thirty years of peaceful, reasonable and energetic development would be needed to make the Czechoslovak State secure and happy. Carpathian Ruthenia certainly needed thirty, if not more, years of peaceful, reasonable and energetic development to emerge from her condition of poverty and primitiveness.

744 One of the worst evils was the appalling sanitary conditions in
164 Ruthenia. The rate of infant mortality was among the highest in

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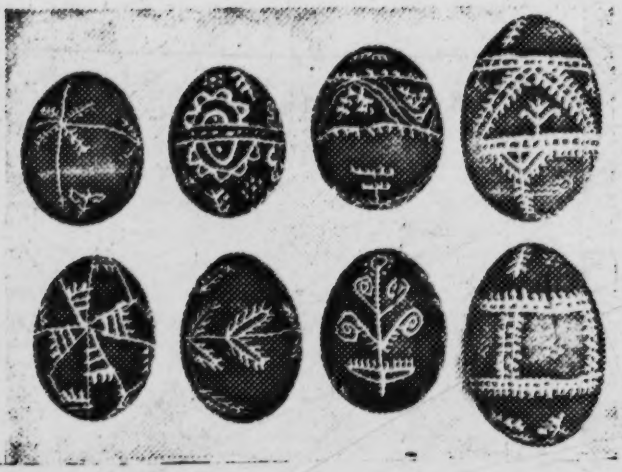
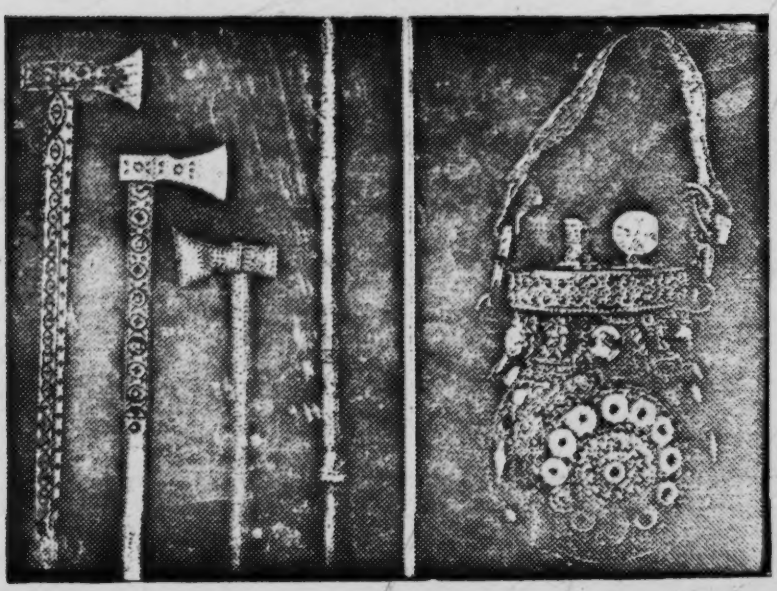


Easter eggs from Ruthenia

Ruthenian folk art



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744 Europe; and many people used to die every year from tuberculosis and
164 other chest complaints. Severe epidemics—typhoid and dysentry—used
to ravage the country every year; inadequate regulation of rivers and
146 stagnant waters gave rise to malaria; undernourishment of large sections
of the population was responsible for sporadic pellagra. Venereal
diseases were a curse owing to lack of medical attention and of appro-
priate legislation.

744 This enormous task was tackled with commendable vigour by the
authorities of the Republic. In a country which used to have very few
185 doctors, a proper medical service was soon organised; up-to-date hospitals
and children's homes were built; Red Cross stations and other hygiene
and welfare institutions, set up in many parts of Ruthenia, strove to
prevent and combat disease. This systematic effort resulted in a sub-
stantial reduction of mortality, while the draining of marshlands and the
regulation of streams and ponds considerably checked epidemics.

185 Realising that ignorance is the root of many social evils, the State
regarded the raising of the standard of education in Ruthenia as one
871 of its foremost tasks. The achievements in this field were perhaps the
most striking. A country, which in 1918 had not more than eighteen
elementary schools where children were only partly taught in
Ruthenian, possessed 520 Ruthenian schools two years later; and after
fifteen years of independence this small country in the Carpathians
could boast 1,079 schools of various kinds—elementary, upper, secon-
dary, technical and special schools. The magnitude of this achievement
becomes evident when it is borne in mind that it was necessary to
educate the requisite number of Ruthenian teachers from among the
rising generation.

871 Thanks to these efforts illiteracy among the younger people has
become rare. Those Ruthenians who according to the last census of
212 1930 were still unable to read and write were largely middle-aged or
185 old people. But even among them illiteracy has been considerably
reduced because evening schools for adults were opened wherever pos-
517 sible. The people of Ruthenia proved to be keen pupils. Within a
few years the neglected country had a promising intelligentsia—admin-
istrative workers, teachers, journalists, writers, doctors, engineers,
composers, artists and scientists. In the thirties more than eighty
periodicals, among them ten dailies, appeared in Ruthenia, and the
production of books grew from year to year. The innate aptitude for
arts and crafts was given a chance of development when a special art
school was established in Užhorod, and musical talent, too, received
much encouragement. As many as 7.7 per cent of all musical com-
positions and songs broadcast by Czechoslovak radio stations were the
work of Ruthenian musicians.

000 Economic development was essential to a country where bread used

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An Ikon

A Russian church in the capital of Ruthenia

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511 Economic development was essential to a country where bread used
433 to be a delicacy and meat or salt a luxury. The Land Reform intro-
185 duced in the whole of the Republic in 1919 was a right step in this direction, although the standard of living among the peasant population in the mountainous districts still left something to be desired even during the last years of the Republic. Industrial development, too, was promoted, and 459 factories (timber, food, stone, earthenware, glass, chemicals, electricity, metal, paper) sprang up on Ruthenian territory during the twenty years of freedom. An important factor in the industrial development was the electrification of the country which before 1918 had hardly any electricity. Better road and rail communications, too, assisted in Ruthenia's gradual progress.

The work done in Carpathian Ruthenia under the Republic was a promising beginning. The regrettable setback due to the re-occupation of the country is likely to remain a mere episode. For the resistance of the population and the struggle of the partisans indicate that the Ruthenians are aware of their mission as a free people and that they wish to continue on the path of progress on which they embarked when they decided to become a member of the Czechoslovak Republic.